

30. The Epistle of 1Peter—4:12-19

(8/15/18)

1 Peter 4:12 (NKJV)

¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

Now, as we said when we started 1Peter—Peter probably wrote his first epistle around A.D. 63, and his second epistle sometime in 64 A.D.

If the date for the writing of this epistle is accurate (63 A.D.)—then Peter’s admonition concerning the **‘fiery trial which is to try you’** seems to have been prophetic.

You see in A.D. 64 Emperor Nero is believed to have been responsible for setting Rome on fire and blaming the Christians.

As one writer said—

“For nine days during the summer of A.D. 64, a huge fire raged in the city of Rome. The flames spread rapidly through the city’s narrow streets and the many tightly bunched wooden tenements, ordinarily crowded with residents. Because of his well-known desire to refurbish Rome by whatever means, the populace believed Emperor Nero was responsible for starting the blaze. As the fire destroyed most of the city’s districts, he watched gleefully from the Tower of Maecenas. Roman troops prevented people from extinguishing the fire and even started new fires. The disaster thoroughly demoralized the Romans because many lost nearly all their earthly goods and found their civic pride scorched as well. With public resentment toward him at a high level, Nero diverted the focus away from himself and made the Christian community the scapegoat for the fire.

Nero’s ploy was a clever one because Christians in the Roman Empire were already the unjust targets of much hatred and slander. Unbelievers falsely reported that Christians consumed human flesh and blood during the Lord’s Supper (cf. Mark 14:22–25; 1 Cor. 11:23–26) and that the holy kiss (cf. 5:14; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26) was actually a sign of uncontrolled lust. In addition, the Romans viewed Christianity as a sect of Judaism. With the increasing anti-Semitism of those days, the populace easily adopted an anti-Christian attitude as well...

Following the burning of Rome, Nero capitalized on that anti-Christian sentiment and punished the Christians by using them as human torches to light his garden parties, by allowing them to be sewn inside animal skins to be devoured by predatory animals, by crucifying them, and by subjecting them to other heinous, unjust tortures.

The apostle Peter likely wrote this letter just before Nero's persecution began...Peter's major recurring theme is how his readers should respond to unjust suffering. Today hostility toward Christians who speak out against the culture's sins and in defense of the exclusivity of the gospel is on the rise. Therefore, to endure the present hostility, as well as what might come in the future, believers need to heed this passage's instructions on enduring severe trials."

In modern Christian culture in America, most Christians tend to look upon persecution for their faith as strange and abnormal—and yet in the first century A.D. it was not only considered normal—it was seen as odd if Christians weren't persecuted for their faith.

This is born out in the fact that the words “suffer”, “suffered” and suffering” are used total of twenty-one times in this Epistle.

Apparently, Peter was a bit of a pessimist—a gloomy fellow who should have picked up a copy of “Your Best Life Now” and started making some positive confessions!

Actually, Peter was following the teaching of his Master, who had told His disciples many years earlier—

John 15:18-19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

And that's why he earlier said,

1 Peter 2:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

And now at the end of his epistle, he reminds us once again by saying—

1 Peter 4:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

This reminds me of how James opened his epistle—

James 1:2-3 (NKJV)

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

Right up-front, James presents the difference between spiritual and carnal believers—it comes down to how they see trials and how they receive trials.

At the core is how each sees this life—carnal Christians look at life from earth's perspective and view their Christianity as a vehicle for God to bless them.

For these people God exists to make them happy and bless them with all kinds of material treasures—as they are all about laying up for themselves treasures on earth.

In contrast, mature, Spirit-filled Christians see life from an eternal perspective and view their Christian life as a way to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven by taking up their cross, denying themselves and living for the glory of God while on this earth.

The first group tends to see trials as a satanic plot to destroy their earthly happiness—and therefore believes that the devil needs to be 'rebuked' when he attacks with trials so that they can once again enjoy God's blessings in this life.

Whereas the second group sees trials as being necessary for growth and spiritual development—a part of God's plan to better equip them for service to their Lord.

And so with that in mind, the rest of 1Peter 4 contains exhortations and explanations concerning suffering for Jesus sake.

1 Peter 4:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, **that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.**

Now in general, when the Rapture happens it will be an incredibly joyous occasion for us who are Christians.

Not only because the Lord will have evacuated us off of the earth before His judgment is poured out on this Christ-rejecting world—but also because we will finally see our Lord Jesus Christ face to face!

It's hard to imagine the joy that we as Christians will experience when we suddenly find ourselves in the air with our glorified bodies seeing Jesus for the first time and knowing that—all the problems, adversities, heartaches and physical infirmities we endured in this life on earth will finally and forever be over and now an eternity of endless joy awaits us with Him in heaven!

Revelation 21:4 (NKJV)

⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

However, the Rapture will not necessarily be a joyous occasion for all Christians—for many it will be a time of shame when they see Jesus face to face:

1 John 2:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (Comment)

The idea that Peter is expressing in verse 13 when he said that as Christians we should **rejoice to the extent that we partake of Christ's suffering** is that—if we are suffering for our faith in this world it proves that we belong to Jesus—

John 15:20-21 (NKJV)

²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

William MacDonald—

“We have no right to expect better treatment from the world than our Savior received. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). It is especially true that those who take a forthright stand for Christ become the object.”

1 Peter 4:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

Luke 6:22-23 (NKJV)

²² Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile *you*, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

1 Peter 4:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

In the Christian life there are basically two kinds of suffering we can experience—1) Suffering for righteousness sake; 2) Suffering for unrighteousness sake.

There are people in our society that are so warped in their thinking that when they do evil they and get caught they make themselves the victim or even claim they are being persecuted for acting righteously.

I saw a news report of a man who had kidnapped a young woman, kept her as a prisoner and raped her daily for years. And yet when he was finally apprehended and stood before a judge, he actually claimed he was the victim!

In an online article I just read today said—

“A CNN contributor who also writes for a Pakistani newspaper says that people who criticize Muslims and their political agenda in the West are participating in “domestic terrorism.”

“It is Islamists, who sometimes commit acts of terror, who are the real victims.” So suggested Rafia Zakaria in a CNN forum on the recent attack by social-media platforms on Alex Jones and his Infowars website.

“In Zakaria’s world, those opposing Islamic terrorism and mass Islamic immigration to the West should be considered terrorists while Islamists carrying out actual terrorism in the West should be considered victims,” the blog post said.”

This is the world we’re living in—an evil world where many call evil good and good evil.
(Isa.5:20)

Now, Peter admonishes us that if we suffer—we are to suffer for doing good and not for doing evil.

And then he lists a few of the sins that must never characterize a child of God—he or she must never be found guilty for being a **murderer** or a **thief**.

In the ancient world these were serious crimes and often brought the death penalty upon those that were guilty of committing either of these crimes.

Those convicted of these crimes had no right to complain about being punished unjustly.

Then Peter adds that a Christians must never be **an evildoer**.

In the Greek, this a broad and more general term encompassing all crimes and acts of lawlessness (especially violations with regard to the laws of God).

This takes us back to what he said earlier in his epistle—

1 Peter 2:13-17 (NLT2)

¹³ For the Lord’s sake, respect all human authority—whether the king as head of state, ¹⁴ or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. ¹⁵ It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. ¹⁶ For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. ¹⁷ Respect everyone, and love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God, and respect the king.

Now, these first three examples of sin are obviously things we as children of God know are evil and must always stay away from.

But then Peter kind of throws us a ‘curve ball’ in that, alongside these very serious sins, he adds something that most Christians today would consider a minor transgression—certainly not on the level of something like murder!

He tells us that, as Christians, we must not be **busybodies in other people’s matters**—the NASB translates this as “*troublesome meddlers*”.

And again, it seems that this is a relatively small sin when compared to the other three Peter mentions, until you realize that—more lives have been damaged, more reputations destroyed and more families and churches have been torn apart by *gossips* and *meddling troublemakers* than murder or stealing have ever been guilty of doing.

This is why Paul admonished believers—

1 Thessalonians 4:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

One pastor expanded the application when he stated—

“Christians are never to be troublemakers or agitators in society or in their places of work (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1–3; Titus 3:1–5). They may confront the sins in the lives of other believers, help administer church discipline, challenge unbelievers with the gospel, and exhort fellow saints to greater levels of godliness; but regarding others’ private matters that do not concern them, believers should never intrude inappropriately. More specifically, Peter was referring to

political activism and civil agitation—disruptive or illegal activity that interferes with the smooth functioning of society and government. Such activity would compel the authorities to mete out punishment (Rom. 13:2–4...It is wrong for believers to view that punishment as persecution for their faith. If they step outside the faith and bring trouble, hostility, resentment, or persecution on themselves, they have no more right to expect Holy Spirit relief than if they were murderers.”
The pastor then added a personal anecdote—

“I remember a conversation I once had with a Russian pastor who had suffered greatly under Soviet communism. I asked if he or his fellow Christians ever rebelled against that form of government. He replied that it was all their convictions that if they were ever resented and persecuted by the secular authorities, it would be for the gospel only. The Russian church actually grew strong in that environment...”

1 Peter 4:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶ **Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.**

As most of you already know—the early church didn't refer to themselves as *Christians* initially.

They referred to one another as “**brethren**” (Acts 1:15–16; 6:3; 9:30; 12:17; 15:13), “**saints**” (Acts 9:13; Rom. 8:27; 15:25; 1 Cor. 16:1), and those of “**the Way**” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

Interestingly and ironically, the term ‘**Christian**’ was originally a derogatory term used by the enemies of Christ to denote His followers—they called them “Christ-anians”—“*Christ-followers*” or what we would say today, “*Jesus-people*”.

However, believers liked that term and co-opted it—so they first called themselves ‘Christians’ in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:26).

1 Peter 4:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ **For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?** ¹⁸ **Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"**

This is an interesting if not somewhat confusing statement by Peter—let’s break it down and see if we can’t clarify any confusion surrounding it.

For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God

The word ‘**time**’ is *kairos* which doesn’t mean time in seconds, minutes and hours—this Greek word carries with it the idea of an occasion, opportunity or the season for something to take place.

Ephesians 5:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

So, Peter is saying that this is the time (season) for God’s judgment to begin—at the house of God.

The Greek for word for **judgment** is *krima* and can refer to a punitive judgment as in a court of law.

But the word could also mean a judgment connected to a reward or an award as when an athlete stands before the judgment seat at the Olympics and receives his or her prize.

The house of God is a term used for all those who belong to the family of God—in other words believers in Christ, the Church.

Now understand, that when Peter says, “**the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God**”—he is not saying that some Christians will someday be judged and sent to hell for sins they might still be wrestling with in their walk.

I believe the period of **time** Peter is referring to is the time of the Church Age (Pentecost to the Rapture).

Remember that Peter’s statement about judgment was spoken in the context of the suffering of believer’s at the hands of unbelievers—suffering which he referred to as *‘fiery trials’* (v.12).

During this age (Church Age), the church is undergoing **judgment** by the unbelieving world—believers are experiencing their sufferings now, just as Jesus did when He was on earth.

One author said—

*“Right now, God uses suffering as a **judgment** (in a positive, purifying sense) for Christians (**the house of God**). Now is our time of fiery trial (1 Peter 4:12); the ungodly will have their fire later. The fire we endure now purifies us; the fire the ungodly will endure will punish them. Yet we always remember that there is never any punishment from God for us in our sufferings, only purification. For the Christian, the issue of punishment was settled once and for all at the cross, where Jesus endured all the punishment the Christian could ever face from God.”*

John 5:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

Romans 8:1 (NKJV)

¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...*

Christians do suffer some of the same things the ungodly do, yet the *purpose* of God is different, and the *effect* is different—as someone has said, *“the same fire that consumes straw will purify gold.”*

1 Peter 4:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; **and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?**

In other words, if God allows His own children to experience suffering in this world for doing good—what will the eternal suffering be like for those who have made themselves His enemies and have lived to do evil?

As one pastor put it—

“Christians can rejoice that the sufferings they face in this life are the worst they will ever face throughout all eternity. We have seen the worst; those who reject Jesus Christ have seen the best of life their eternal existence will ever see.”

And then Peter adds—"Now *"If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"* (v.18)

This takes us back to something Peter said to open up this epistle—

1 Peter 1:18-19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like silver or gold*, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

The redemption of a human soul involved a price that no human being could pay—

Psalm 49:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him-- ⁸ For the redemption of their souls is costly...

The redemption of a human soul is so costly that no amount of money can purchase it—it requires a blood payment—"life for life".

This is something God communicated to the first two people of the face of the earth who sinned—Adam and Eve.

Genesis 2:15-17 (NLT)

¹⁵ The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. ¹⁶ But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— ¹⁷ except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

When Adam and Eve sinned, they tried to cover the shame of their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together—but God didn't accept that covering.

Instead He killed a couple of animals and covered them with the skins of those animals to establish the law that the guilt of man's sin could never be covered by the works of his own hands (that's religion) it would require a blood sacrifice—the innocent dying in the place of the guilty.

Under the Old Covenant God provided a sacrificial system whereby the blood of animals could be substituted for the guilty person to atone for their sins.

The one stipulation that God commanded with regard to the animal sacrifices offered to Him was that—they had to be without ‘spot’ or ‘blemish’—

Leviticus 22:21 (NKJV)

²¹ And whoever offers a sacrifice of a peace offering to the LORD, to fulfill *his* vow, or a freewill offering from the cattle or the sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it.

In other words, they couldn’t have any birth defects or acquired wounds or injuries—they had to be ‘perfect’ if God was to accept them as payment for their sin.

But even then, the blood of these animals would only be allowed by God to temporarily *cover* (hide) the sins of His people—they couldn’t remove the stain of sin from their souls.

As the writer of Hebrews explains, “*It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Heb. 10:4).

Of course, this all pointed to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, Who was without spot or blemish (born sinless and never sinned during His entire life on earth), and Whose precious blood removed the stain of our sins completely and forever—

Hebrews 9:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The only ransom God would accept for the redemption of fallen sinners was the blood of His Son—the innocent (sinless) dying for the guilty.

I don’t think most Christians realize how great a work of God went into our redemption.

We talk about the vastness of the universe God created with all of the planets and galaxies—truly a spectacular thing to behold.

But look, as spectacular as the creation is do you realize that only 31 verses in Genesis chapter one are devoted to the creation—and the rest of the Bible to redemption?

The Bible tells us that creation was the work of God's fingers—“*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained...*” (Ps.8:3)

However, when it came to redemption, the Bible says He—“*bared His arms*” (rolled up His sleeves).

The work of redemption—or as Paul the apostle put it “the new creation” was far more involved and from a human standpoint, far more difficult to accomplish than was the original creation of the physical universe.

In the creation of the physical universe all God had to do was *speak* and everything came into existence—but when it came to the redemption of our souls the Lord Jesus Christ, God in human form, had to *die*!

Once again, God's Word is very clear on this point—“...without shedding of **blood** there is no remission (of sin). (Hebrews 9:22)

1 Peter 4:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator [i.e. the Creator of the 'new creation'].

The word *commit* is a banking term; it means “to deposit for safekeeping” (see 2 Tim. 1:12).

Of course, when you deposit your life in God's bank, you always receive eternal dividends on your investment!